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ABSTRACT

The results of a study that probed the differential effects of low income parent involvement in the Dane County, Wisconsin, Head Start program are summarized in this paper. Different levels of parental involvement in the educational process of their preschool children were selected for study: enrolling the child in Head Start, receiving home visits, volunteering in the classroom, serving on the policy making committee, being paid employees, taking adult education courses in the community, and serving on community boards/committes. The study's main hypothesis was that involvement at the policy making level of Head Start has an important effect upon the lives of low income adults. Interviews were used to elicit 25 parents' feelings about the process of being involved in Head Start. Information was collected about age, marital status, number of children enrolled in Head Start, and economic and employment status. Respondents were also asked about self perceived changes in their behavior and self concept. Personal changes were reported by nearly every respondent at several involvement levels. The most effective change agents were employment in Head Start and serving on the parent advisory committees. This study shows that the involvement of low income, disadvantaged parents in Head Start programs can result in increased self confidence, control over their own lives, and community participation. (Author/GC)

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PARENT INVOLVEMENT: PARENT DEVELOPMENT

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PARENT INVOLVEMENT: PARENT DEVELOPMENT

Diane Adams*

Fundamental to the creation of Head Start for disadvantaged children is the belief that their parents have the potential to themselves change as they become involved in Head Start. Despite this belief, and the proliferation of Head Start programs nationally, little substantive research has been conducted to measure the impact of this parental involvement on the lives of Head Start adults. The results of a study which probes the differential effects of adult involvement in the Dane County, Wisconsin, Head Start program, are summarized here in the hope the findings will be of interest to others concerned with this complex and intriguing aspect of contemporary educational programs.

Dane County is a particularly suitable locus for the study of Head Start parent involvement and consequent changes in the behaviors of adult participants. All the elements for carrying out historical case studies are present. A full-year Head Start program has existed since 1965, with over 200 children enrolled each year. Furthermore, an innovative tradition of parental involvement focused on adult learning makes it possible to probe deeply into the identification of the varying activities offered Head Start parents to see if they might be put into any sort of theoretical framework. The first task was to look at the policy of parent involvement as mandated by Head Start.

I. Background

The assumptions and goals concerning Head Start adult involvement are clearly stated in the Head Start Manual of Policies (Office of Child Development, 1970):

> "Head Start believes that the gains made by the child in Head Start must be understood and built upon by the family and the community. To achieve this goal, Head Start provides for the involvement of the child's parents and other members of the family . . . by giving them many opportunities for a richer appreciation of the young child's needs and how to satisfy them."

The document later suggests that parents may react differently to their exposure to various parent involvement opportunities. For some parents, participation may begin with a simple step and move to more complex levels. For other parents the movement will be immediate, perhaps due to past experiences, into complex levels of participation.

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It appears from this and other literature that the more traditional welfare-modeled approach where clients were assumed to "need" certain predefined helps which an agency was impelled to provide was not deemed sufficient in the "War on Poverty" programs. The concept of "participant participation" was felt most feasible for directly attacking both the causes and the effects of poverty.

Partly in response to research findings that working with parents improves the gains made by children and partly in response to this idea of participatory democracy, parent involvement in Head Start was designed to explore as many facets of parent growth as possible. Both the significant gains for children were hoped for, as well as a responsive "target population" which would approve of and wholeheartedly participate in, the local Head Start program. To this end a variety of parent activities were created by, for and with parents.

It appeared these activities could be clustered around several levels of involvement. These levels intertwine with each other in an experiential sense and no level of involvement exerts a totally independent influence upon individual behavior. Critical to this theoretical model is the premise that each level of involvement may exert more or less educational impact on any single individual. They are not meant to be exhaustive, but rather represent the state of this relatively new art of involving low-income parents in educational endeavors. Parents were found to be involved in parent actions which directly affect the learning of their children (in a Tutor role), parents were found to be serving on policy-making bodies in Head Start (in a Decision-Maker role), working for the program (as Paid Employees), entering into educational activities for themselves (as Adult Education participants), and continuing their involvement in community affairs (as Reinvestors). These various roles give rise to the following eight levels of involvement:

Levels 1 - 3: Parents as Tutors. Three levels of involvement are subsumed under the Tutor role. These are: Level 1 - Enrolling the child in Head Start. For some parents this is a step involving massive investment of self. Level 2 - Receiving home visits. Having teachers make a home visit to enhance the parent's role as prime teacher of her own children is a new experience for some parents. Level 3 - Volunteering in the classroom (or in the program anywhere). For some parents this is a new venture in the world of education where their ideas and abilities are welcomed. All three of these levels of participation could be seen as possible first steps in qualifying for non-professional employment in Head Start.

Level 4 - Parents as Decision-Makers. Parents, by Head Start mandate, must have the opportunity to become involved in the making of decisions concerning the nature and operation of the program. In Dane County, this decision-making body has been filled with current and past participants, as well as community members. Representatives to the Parent Advisory Council give the project proposal application careful scrutiny before it is submitted, suggesting program improvements. Decisions of a critical nature, minimal-action decisions, stalemates, and outright disintegration have been dealt with by various PAC's in the decade since Head Start's inception. The strength or weakness of the PAC at any given time depended on a host of interacting variables, including the length of time members had been on the Council, the Director's influence, and the state of funding at the time.

This level of parent involvement presents head-on the problem of casting low-income persons, traditionally powerless, into leadership positions where they may experience power and exercise either competent or uncertain control. Substantial changes have been documented elsewhere (Zurcher, 1970) as low-income individuals have participated in decision-making bodies. The exact dimensions of this level are continually being re-made with each new PAC, but there seems to be a clear indication that it is an influential level for individual parents.

Level 5 - Parents as Paid Employees - Using the "new careers" philosophy expounded by Pearl and Reissman (1965), parents have been provided education, on-the-job training and increased income through direct employment in Head Start, performing recognized tasks that serve the children, other parents and the community. Becoming a paid paraprofessional involves in-service and other types of educational training, and, in Dane County, opens the opportunity to move up the career ladder to more advanced levels of skills, expectations and pay. This role of Paid Employee (Stearns, 1973) has many ramifications for the program and the community, not the least of which is the increased status for individuals who find themselves "employed," rather than "just on welfare."

Levels 6 and 7 - Parents as Adult Education Participants. Other research (Stearns, 1973) has included parent education under the Tutor role, since parent education has traditionally been thought of as education in how to be a better parent. Parent education in the Dane County Head Start program, while not neglecting parenting skills, has defined this level of participation more in terms of adult education, where parents gain insights into many areas of knowledge. Level 6 includes the parent groups, organized at the center level for all parents, to "teach" both what parents have requested, and in some cases to provide information the program feels it is important for parents to know. Level 7 includes the formal adult education courses offered by agencies in the community. Head Start parents have been found to be actively involved in both types of adult education.

Level 8 - Parents as Re-Investors. One final level of participation which extends itself beyond Head Start is that of "re-investor." The parent who is active at several levels of involvement in Head Start quite often finds that, when leaving the program as a participating parent, she* is asked to serve on boards and committees in the community, or in some way to re-invest herself in the life of the community. Re-investors have served, or do now serve, as community citizens on boards. They are no longer cast in the role of "low-income participants," but now are viewed as persons with experience on a policy-making body, with the extra qualification of having come from the low-income community. This unique contribution may have been slighted in the aftermath of poverty programs, and it is offered here as a subject for future research.

Thus, eight different levels of parent involvement have been selected for study: enrolling the child, receiving home visits, volunteering in the classroom, serving on the policy-making committee, being paid employees, being in parent education groups, taking adult education courses in the community, and serving on boards and/or committees in the community.

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*In order to avoid cumbersome language, the female pronoun is used throughout with no disparity intended.

II. Description

The thrust of this study has been to look at adult involvement in the Dane County, Wisconsin Head Start program through the eyes of its participants. The main hypothesis was that involvement at the policy-making level of Head Start has an important effect upon the lives of low-income adults. Changes in behavior are difficult to document in retrospect, but the respondents were asked one key question about each level of involvement: "Do you think that this (activity) changed you in any way?" By using this kind of self-analysis, subjective measures could be created. These were complemented by such objective measures as movements from being On Welfare to Off Welfare, from being non-employed to employed, and from having no high school diploma to receiving the high school equivalency.

Loosely structured tape-recorded interviews were used to elicit both facts and feelings about the process of having been involved in Head Start. Parents were asked to give biographical information about age and marital status, and how many of their children had been enrolled in Head Start. They participated in a self-concept inventory, utilizing a semantic differential test of paired items. In addition, they were asked to describe the various levels of parental involvement in which they had participated, and to explore their feelings about each level.

A sample of 24 women and 1 man who served on the advisory council for the Dane County program were interviewed. Men have served on the Parent Council each year of the program, but the groups from which they were elected have been composed primarily of parents from female-headed households. The preponderance of women in the sample, then, is representative of the program's actual makeup.

The respondents range from 25 to 50 years of age, and have an average of 4 children per respondent. Ten of the sample are currently married, the remainder being separated, divorced or never married; the majority are heads of one-parent families. Eighteen had been AFDC recipients at some time during their adult lives. The 7 who had not were "low-income" according to economic guidelines used by Head Start. These respondents as a group were not the "chronically unemployed," though they had held only low-status jobs. They were all, however, unemployed at the time they enrolled their children in Head Start.

Adults who serve on the Parent Council represent every range along a continuum of abilities, from those with a command of language enabling them to articulate their choices in a precise manner to those whose ability to use language for getting information and making decisions is very limited. The sample includes a broad range of adults with diverse skills and interests. All the sample are high school graduates, with three gaining their high school equivalency diplomas after becoming involved in Head Start. The educational level of this sample is relatively high if compared with low-income populations elsewhere. However, the median number of school years completed for female adults is 12.6 in Dane County, which is also higher than that found for the rest of the state as a whole. (County and City Data Book, 1972) More than half the sample originally came from small towns or rural communities; all but one currently reside in Madison, Dane County's largest city.

III. Results

These 25 adults had children in Head Start from 1966 to 1972, with some having had successive children enrolled in the program nearly all of those years. The transcribed interviews were coded and content-analyzed to lift out statements of change as perceived by the respondents. Certain theoretical predictions were made which aided in the analysis, based on the following criteria:

1. The respondent's own statement of how much she had changed was crucial. If the respondent involved herself at every level and said none of them effected any change, then those levels were not change-producing for that individual.

2. A change in economic status so that the individual was not in the same position as at the time when she entered Head Start would be seen as indicative of change in behavior.

The predictions were that respondents who had involved themselves at many different levels of adult participation in Head Start would probably exhibit the most change, both in terms of personal evaluation and in actual economic status. Not all levels of involvement would be remembered in the same way by every respondent - partially due to the length of time it had been since some of the individuals had entered Head Start. However, due to the nature of the sample, it was predicted that Level 4 - Parents as Decision-Makers - would be the best remembered, and, along with paid employment, be the level of most influence. Parents who were seen to be "re-investors," carrying their leadership role in Head Start into other areas of the community, would predictably have been the "most involved" in terms of an intensity index devised for the study, would be those most involved in continuing education and would have experienced significant changes in their economic status.

The intensity with which these respondents involved themselves in the adult component of Head Start is intriguing to notice. The respondents were rated on an intensity index which would help differentiate between individuals who were more or less involved at each of these levels. Since all of the sample had indeed enrolled their children, attended parent group meetings at least a few times, and had served on the Advisory Council, using such an index made it possible to sort out some of the subtle differences between the respondents. Points were assigned for each level. For instance, at the level of enrolling the child, Level 1, it was possible to be given 1 point for enrolling one child, and 2 points for having had more than one child in Head Start, and thus more exposure to the program. Finishing a degree, in the adult education portion of the levels, gave an individual 3 points, as compared with those taking no courses who got 0 points. Individuals could get as many as 19 points or as few as 4 points on this index.

Analyses of how much adults change through an adult learning situation have revealed that there are varying degress of change for different individuals. Some adults, when spurred to learn, simply "turn off"; others react by maintaining their old ways of being. Rivera (1972) has reminded us: "Adults only change if they learn (consciously or unconsciously). They may be pushed to learn by external circumstances, social conflict, and personal crisis, or be sparked to learn. . . by self-concept-challenging education." While all the

dynamics of this adult learning situation are impossible to explore, many of these respondents were faced with what was, for them, a challenging type of adult learning experience. Let us turn next to examine the responses to each of the levels of involvement.

A. Parents as Tutors: Enrolling the Child - Level 1

For 100% of the respondents, sending their children to a pre-school or early childhood program would not have been possible except for Head Start. Nearly all (96%) felt that Head Start was helpful to their children in terms of school preparation and individual attention to the child. For these respondents pre-school education was a totally new experience; 14 of them had more than one child subsequently enrolled, one had five and another had six children in Head Start!

Enrolling their children in Head Start was seen as being instrumental in changing their own behaviors for 64% of the sample. One practical consequence for these low-income parents was, that for a portion of the day at least, they were relieved of some child care responsibility. At the same time, they were encouraged and supported in their major role as child-rearer by the Head Start staff. They felt the program tried to enhance their task as prime teacher of their children, and indicated this changed their concept of self and aided in developing their confidence as parents.

B. Parents as Tutors: Receiving Home Visits - Level 2

The second level of involvement was that of receiving Head Start staff members into their homes for the purposes of classroom extension or providing social services. None of these respondents had ever had a home visit from any teacher (public or pre-school) before. Literature abounds which suggests this kind of intervention technique as being efficacious in changing both adults and children. In this study, home visits were the least remembered of all the levels of involvement, and only 20% of the sample felt home visits changed them in any way. However, 52% said they learned something useful from the home visits that they were able to put into practice later on with their children; learning "how to talk to children" or "how to read stories to kids" were seen as practical outcomes from home visiting.

If low-income adults sometimes exhibit distrust of authorities, as is well documented in the "poverty literature," then it is interesting to note how these respondents not only welcomed Head Start staff members into their homes, but willingly listened and participated in the home visits. That there seems to be so little change attributed to this level may indicate that this is the wrong sample; persons outgoing and interested enough to be elected to the Parent Council may not be as amenable to change through an intervention technique such as home visitation. In recent years Dane County has implemented Home Visitation programs of a different nature. It appears that other factors such as extreme isolation, having no transportation and little access to any socialization situations for their children causes some parents to react with greater affinity for such home-based programs. For this sample, it was only mildly influential in changing behaviors, at least in retrospect. It does seem

difficult for the respondents to differentiate between what they learned from enrolling children and what they may have learned through home visits; it is not unexpected that, in the rash of new experiences, much learning might take place, but exactly where it was learned would be hard to document.

The social factor in home visits seems to have been more deep-seated than the actual teaching that took place. Many respondents reveal a genuine liking of Head Start staff members which undoubtedly had its genesis in those home visits ostensibly made for teaching parents or for solving some immediate problem.

C. Parents as Tutors: Volunteering - Level 3

Perhaps one of the most creative elements in the Dane County Head Start program is that of involving parents as volunteers in the classroom, and crediting their volunteer time as part of the "in-kind" contribution from the community. For 100% of the respondents, volunteering was a totally new experience, and they were totally unfamiliar with the sorts of expectations and responsibilities they would face. Given the debilitating conditions of poverty, it might well have been unreasonable to expect Head Start parents to volunteer; given fewer resources, more children, ill health or physical deficits there could be many factors which would result in parents being unavailable or even desirable as classroom volunteers. In a sample of all Head Start parents, one could expect to find many parents who would never have volunteered for a host of reasons, not the least of which is being employed elsewhere during the time Head Start is in session.

Most of this sample did respond to this level of participation and 40% of them said it changed them, pointing to direct results such as new volunteering in the public schools, something they had never done before with older children. Sixty-two percent felt this level gave them some useful information, so that they were able to transfer some of what they saw happening in the classroom into their own homes. Other volunteering opportunities, such as going along on field trips, or helping in the kitchen, seemed equally useful in picking up new insights in interacting with young children. This is, of course, one of the hoped-for outcomes of the classroom volunteering and observation components encouraged for parents. As a matter of fact, these parents did learn from watching trained teachers, from sitting in on the classroom planning activities, and from observing educational encounters firsthand. One mother reacted to the classroom volunteering in this way:

> "I think it really helped me to understand my own children more to be in there volunteering . . . Just because you have these babies doesn't mean you necessarily know the best way to handle them, or the best way to work with them."

D. Parents as Decision-Makers: Serving on the Parent Council - Level 4

All of the respondents served on the Parent Advisory Council for periods ranging from a few months to three years. Their acquaintance with the functions of, and their intensity of involvement with, the PAC varies tremendously. Some

of the respondents could report about committee structure and proposal writing activities in perfect "bureaucratese" - using the language of government funded agencies. Others could give no overall picture of what this policy-making body was supposed to have done, and remember their own involvement rather hazily. Still others were only on the Council briefly as elected members, but were later employed by Head Start and had direct responsibility to the Council, such as the office aide who ran off the minutes, or the social work aide who provided transportation for PAC members. Early in its history, the PAC made the ruling that no Head Start employee could serve on the Council.

The Dane County Head Start program has been persistent in its attempts to elect members to the PAC from the broad-based population of Head Start parents, and parents have rather consistently been in the majority on the Council, with relatively few non-poor community members serving each year. For this sample, involvement on the PAC was an entirely new experience; 100% had never served on any similar body before. They were elected to the Council in a variety of ways. Presumably they would have been elected from the parent education groups which were formed around each of the children's classrooms or in neighborhood groupings, which acted as Center Policy Committees. However, as many parents reported they were "pushed," "shoved," "drafted," or "trapped" into being on the Council, as were those "elected."

Despite their assorted methods of entry onto the Council, all the respondents said this policy-making body was intended to have the function of "making decisions about the program." To some respondents it appeared that they had plenty of information provided them in order to make reasonable decisions; to others it seemed they were "being led" by the Director or by outside influences. Some 24% of the respondents felt the Council's job was to "rubber-stamp" decisions already made by someone else; others felt this was not entirely unreasonable, given their inexperience at the time.

These respondents recalled many important decisions made while they were on the Council which affected the agency for that year, or years to come. For instance, one parent remembered working "very hard on the Council - trying to make it easier for those that followed us." They made some crucial decisions, such as the "delegation agreement" whereby Dane County Head Start became a delegate agency, with more autonomy as the prime sponsor of its own programs. They participated in the hiring of new directors, and they developed new agency programs such as the Home Visitation program. In probing deeper as to whether these decisions were actually made by the Council, or whether they indeed "rubber-stamped" decisions already made by the staff or the regional Head Start office, it becomes apparent that much trust existed between the Council and the Director at various times. When that trust was present, respondents recalled they felt they just didn't know enough and accepted the judgment of the Director when making decisions. When they did not like the Director, or when there was no mutual trust, they recalled feeling intolerant of decisions being made "above our heads."

The experience of assuming decision-making powers over a program involving 200+ children and a $200,000 budget could well be seen as the most crucial of all the levels of involvement in terms of individual change. If the process is only an exercise in "maximum feasible participation" it may result in considerable misunderstanding. Eighty-four percent of the respondents replied that the role of serving as a Council member was instrumental in

changing them. Learning communication skills was cited as the most important area of learning:

> ". . . It took me like 2 1/2 months before I had the courage to get up and say: 'Hey, I don't agree with your idea'. . . It took me a while to get into the swing of things, but once I did, I talked. It takes quite a while to get the guts - to get up there, for fear somebody'll laugh at you. You always wonder - are you putting it the right way? Are you putting it in words that don't sound silly to you, but might be real dumb to somebody else the way you're trying to express what you're really thinking? So it took me a while to get the courage."

These respondents seem to have been stymied by the "fancy language" on more than one occasion. It took time for them to feel comfortable and to express themselves, and some never did. Feelings of worth developed for individuals who had felt that circumstances and fate kept them down in the past as they learned they could give their viewpoints, whether or not they used the language of an educational program, and they would be accepted:

> "I really enjoyed being on the Parent Council because that was the first time I really spoke out and felt comfortable and had the self-confidence to talk to a group. I didn't feel anyone was using me as an outcast."

Those respondents who felt they were not changed by being on the PAC give evidence of less intense involvement. Two served only a few months, and one felt she was the only person from her parent group who was interested in Head Start, so that she didn't have a committed group to which to report back Council business. These remained cynical about the role of the Council in changing Head Start parents.

Among these former PAC members are several who were officers, including two who were president of the PAC, one who was president of the Corporate Board (during the last three years a new structure was in existence), one was vice president, ~~three~~ three were secretary, and one was president of the Community Action Commission.

The role of a Council member is not always understood and accepted by the staff. Some low-income participants recall their involvement on the PAC as a continual frustration, with their ideas going nowhere. Turmoil and lengthy meetings, hasty Council training and no clear delineation of responsibilities, as well as the more growth-producing encounters, have seemed to be a part of involvement as decision-makers.

It is outside the scope of this paper to evaluate the extent to which the PAC has been effective in its decision-making concerning the Dane County program. These respondents do, however, seem to shatter the stereotype that the poor lack motivation, or that they do not have sufficient knowledge, or the ability to gain that knowledge, to run their own programs. In this more anthropological approach to understanding the phenomenon of being involved in a

social action program, there is the attendant risk of memory distortion. Yet the fact that the Council has, over time, made effective decisions to the point that the program has been re-funded every year since 1965 points to no small amount of competent leadership from the low-income parent participants.

E. Parents as Paid Employees - Level 5

Eight of these respondents were employed by Head Start, with two of them currently employed in the program. All of them were unemployed at the time they were hired, having earlier had low-paying jobs. Ninety-nine percent said they were changed by the experience of being a Head Start employee. It appears that employment in Head Start was a necessary first step for future employment. One moved from Head Start as a paraprofessional to the University of Wisconsin system as an Administrative Secretary over a period of several years, one moved to a large day care program as a nutrition aide, and one moved to the Council on Criminal Justice as a Project Analyst. Three others moved into the community by working for the public schools, enrolling in the WIN program, and working for the Community Action Commission.

Through in-service training and constant exposure to other Head Start staff members, consultants and technical advisors, the respondents who were employed in Head Start had more opportunity for day-to-day change than some of the other respondents. Job descriptions and "career ladders" exist within the agency, and each of those who moved from Head Start employment to higher paying positions in the community had moved through the career ladder at least two steps. This notion of the effectiveness of career development for low-income adults has not been fully explored; for the respondents in the current study, the concept was successful in seeing this level of involvement contribute to personal change.

F. Parents in Adult Education: Parent Groups - Level 6

Parent education groups, not new to Head Start, are felt to be instrumental in changing the viewpoints of parents as they discuss child-rearing and its accompanying responsibilities. None of these respondents had ever been involved in a parent group before Head Start, and they had had little contact with other adults. One pointedly remarked about the insular world in which she had lived:

> ". . . I never really spent a great deal of time around adults once I left home - I was just myself and the three children most of the time, and I baby-sat a lot, so it was primarily a child-type world I was geared to. I was apprehensive, but when I started to go to the parent meetings I really found they were a nice group and had a lot of things in common with me, and were not going to come down on me or judge me."

Sixty percent of the respondents felt the parent groups changed them. This change came about through acceptance by a peer group, through widened horizons on the world of child-rearing, and through incorporating practical information into their lives. New ways of handling children, sewing and

nutrition information and making craft items were frequently mentioned as useful contributions made by being in the parent groups.

Perhaps the most unique personal changes which came about by participation in parent groups were the feelings of self-worth which many respondents recalled. One said:

> "The most important thing I got, I think, was a feeling that somebody saw something in me that was worth something that I didn't think I had."

Largely made up of women, the groups often centered around women's issues, such as the practical aspects of divorce laws and child-rearing in a one-parent family. Larger societal issues such as pending federal legislation which would affect low-income people were also discussed. Participant planning goes into the group programming, with resource persons from the University and community agencies providing some leadership. Many of these respondents said the parent groups were instrumental in changing themselves, and other parents they could observe, as well. While group work with low-income parents is not an automatic "success" just because the groups are organized around a ready-made situation such as a Head Start classroom, it seemed to these parents there was at least an optimum chance for all kinds of parents to find acceptance there. The thought remains that for these respondents who found a change-type education within the parent groups, there must be many who did not, for perhaps unknown reasons.

It was there at parent meetings that many individuals found out about possibilities for adult education courses in the wider community. Most of these respondents went beyond Head Start parent groups and took formal adult education courses in the community.

G. Parents in Adult Education: Taking Courses - Level 7

Twenty-one of these respondents took courses at other institutions in Dane County. This high involvement in formal adult education is a unique development with the onset of poverty programs, and presents a new clientele for agencies of adult education.

Though a majority of this sample were high school graduates, finishing high school had been a hard task for most of these respondents, and many felt their earlier schooling had been unpleasant or a waste of time. When these individuals came to the adult learning situation they faced the frustrations of having been out of school "too long" or having problems with studying at home and retaining high motivation at all times, while at the same time rearing young children. These formidable barriers could account for the fact that only 33% of the sample said taking these formal courses changed them.

Since courses are offered at many instituions in Dane County, it is not necessary to create many new courses for adults within Head Start. Justification for including it in the theoretical framework as a part of Head Start adult involvement lies with the fact that, at least for a portion of the

low-income community, it is only through Head Start that some adults learn of the opportunities for continuing education. Often they were encouraged to enroll in an adult education course by the Head Start parent worker or the Director; some were mandated to take a course for an advancement on the career ladder. Head Start had a direct role in 17 of these respondents taking formal courses.

The route through adult education courses was not altogether smooth, but in at least three cases the adults perservered enough to gain their high school equivalency degrees. It appears that the changes that were brought about by taking courses at the urging of Head Start are to be calibrated by both numbers of courses and feelings of satisfaction at being part of a continuing learning endeavor:

> "I felt so proud - I felt as tall as this world. It makes you feel like a different person, really . . . well, like now, I can say that I got the G.E.D. and nobody's going to be looking to belittle me no more."

H. Parents as Re-Investors - Level 8

Eleven of the respondents qualify as "re-investors," having served on boards and/or committees in the community beyond this pre-school intervention program. They are, for the most part, the more "successful" of the respondents. Eight have moved from being On Welfare to being Off Welfare since the time they entered Head Start, two were Off Welfare then and now, and one remained On Welfare. Four of these re-investors are former Head Start employees. The re-investors rank among the highest on the intensity index, giving rise to the belief that they took advantage of every level of involvement within Head Start, and went from there to give leadership in other places in the community.

They have served on poverty-related boards and committees such as the Community Action Commission, the Neighborhood Youth Corps Board of Directors, and the Family Planning Board. They have served on welfare-related committees, such as the AFDC Council, and the Welfare Rights Organization Board. They have served on the Title I Advisory Council, and the Voluntary Action Board. They have done consulting for Head Start at the state level. The list is long, and their influence has been felt in many different spheres.

The process of moving from the PAC out into the community is not an easy definable leap. It is quite one thing to serve on a parent advisory council where one's child is directly involved in the decisions being made, and another to function as a decision-maker in a more unfamiliar setting.

The Dane County program has been small enough to be able to "keep track" of some of these re-investors; that is, those who served well on the PAC were likely candidates for recommendation to serve on other boards and committees, and were still accessible. That it takes time for such a group of re-investors to develop is evidenced by the fact that all of these who qualify as re-investors trace their involvement with Head Start back to the first two years of the program.

The individuals who are seen as re-investors are clearly able to link their involvement in Head Start and their current role in community affairs. There is evidence from this data that low-income adults are eager to take on new responsibilities in the larger community when their involvement with Head Start is lessened, but that certain prerequisites such as possessing self-confidence, knowledge about how boards and committees operate, and understanding "jargon" are necessary, skills which may be gained through experience in an adult learning situation such as Head Start. These adults give evidence that they are now a part of the larger community and expressed few fears about being accepted.

Table I illustrates how the re-investors rank in terms of intensity* index and changing economic status from the time they entered Head Start.

TABLE I

Re-Investors: Intensity Index and Welfare Status

N = 11

Individual	Intensity Index Score *	On/Off Welfare Then and Now
1	18	On Welfare/Off Welfare
2	17	On Welfare/Off Welfare
3	17	On Welfare/WIN Student
4	16	On Welfare/Off Welfare
5	14	On Welfare/On Welfare
6	14	On Welfare/Off Welfare
7	13	On Welfare/Off Welfare
8	13	Off Welfare/Off Welfare
9	12	Off Welfare/Off Welfare
10	12	On Welfare/Off Welfare
11	11	Off Welfare/Off Welfare

*Median Intensity Index Score for whole sample = 12

IV. Conclusions

Changes were reported by nearly every respondent at several levels. The more intensely involved respondents seem to have more pronounced changes in

themselves, and give evidence of equally vast changes in economic status. Of the 13 highest on the intensity index, 11 have moved from being On Welfare to being Off Welfare.

Two levels of involvement were said to effect the most change for these respondents: for the eight to whom it applied, employment in Head Start was the most effective level, for all others serving on the PAC was the most effective. These findings support the predictions that were made as to the levels of most influence. Two other levels, participating in the parent groups and actually enrolling the child in Head Start, were also important levels in terms of personal growth.

Three of the levels - receiving home visits, volunteering, and taking adult education courses, affected less change for these respondents. Since no level of involvement was found to be completely ineffectual for these respondents, it is safe to assume <u>some</u> aspects of the adult participation levels will be useful to some parents but not all, but that <u>all</u> parents should have the opportunity to engage in a multi-faceted adult program within Head Start.

In what ways can parents be involved in Head Start? In walking a child to school, in reading to a child in a classroom, in testing-out a new teaching toy at home, in being a teaching assistant, in cooking or transportation duties, in negotiating agreements with other agencies, in planning in-service demonstrations, in leading meetings that matter. The possibilities are almost endless.

What are the consequences of these varied opportunities for parental involvement? From this data there is evidence that a majority will exhibit changed behavior. They may appear shy, inarticulate and withdrawn at the outset, and appear outgoing and confident some months later. They may consider themselves as having no job skills and unemployable at the outset, and reconsider that in light of having had career development experience. They may admit to no changes in themselves, and yet be able to say a child is successful in school, and be proud of it. The range of possibilities is almost endless.

That this sample exhibited so many changes in themselves does not mean these individuals are free from the influences of poverty, or that some magic wand has been waved that forever wipes away the debilitating circumstances in which they had found themselves. Even among these respondents with their strong propensity for change and evidence of having been "successful" as a group, there are concerns about having older children "in trouble" or uncertain family relationships. As low-income people experience sweeping changes in themselves, it would be unrealistic to expect them to muster energy and will enough to change all the accompanying conditions which give rise to personal crisis.

This study is built on the assumption that knowledge of some disadvantaged adults is important. Adult instruction, long on practical programming and relatively short on theory, has not traditionally applied itself to theories about working with disadvantaged adults. The Head Start parent involvement process, seen from the vantage point of a decade of experience, gives rise to a model of adult education for low-income parents.

1. Strategies are called for which exhibit acceptance of each individual's strengths and weaknesses.

2. The creative arrangement of flexible adult learning experiences both within Head Start and the community is essential.

3. Genuine belief in the articulation of low-income adults as they gain growing control over their own programs, and very possibly over their own destinies, is mandated.

4. As poor people gain in confidence and ability to deal with educational ideas, change can be expected, both in individuals and in the larger community's acceptance of them.

5. Once begun, a parent involvement program which focuses on adult growth and change will have the continual challenge each program year in attempting to involve adults who are hard-to-reach and uninterested, as well as those who are eager and involved from the beginning. To continually reach downward to the less interested is the constant challenge in parent involvement.

The eight levels of involvement are critical findings of this study, and are subject for further study. The results show that a careful delineation of a program's parent involvement component may be cause for a greater appreciation of parent growth when it occurs. It is also helpful to be able to pinpoint growth by levels of involvement for program improvement.

Disadvantaged adults who have willingly shared their experiences in an adult learning process offer the best evidence possible that Head Start can play an important role in changing adult behaviors. The advocacy role of Head Start in helping adults take command of their own destinies cannot be minimized. Future research in compensatory education will undoubtedly reveal many areas of failure, and unexplored avenues of involvement, as well as new skills that are needed before effective parent involvement can happen. In looking at the experiences of these adults, we see a wide array of values and lifestyles coming to a common experience, and almost to a person finding some aspect of the programming which was meaningful to them. Perhaps this reflective process will assist Head Start supporters and critics alike to recognize the legitimate role of Head Start in changing not only the children it serves, but parents who are recognized as adults with potential.

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